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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Sixty-third session

Summary record of the 7th meeting
Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 15 March 2018, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Bras Gomes

Contents

Consideration of reports (*continued*)

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Initial report of Bangladesh

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports (*continued*)

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Initial report of Bangladesh (E/C.12/BGD/1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Bangladesh took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Alam** (Bangladesh), providing an overview of his country's development since independence, said that renewed emphasis had been placed on implementing the provisions of the Covenant since the current Government had come into power in 2009, with the aim of transforming Bangladesh into a middle-income country by 2021 and a prosperous one by 2041. Moreover, the priorities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development had been incorporated into the national development agenda. In terms of domestic growth and development, Bangladesh outperformed many other developing nations and was ranked thirty-fourth on the World Economic Forum's Inclusive Development Index.

3. The Government had been taking steps to ensure the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights, including by ensuring equitable distribution of the benefits of development and raising people's standard of living. Its efforts to reduce poverty and increase per capita income had borne fruit: the poverty rate had fallen by more than 10 per cent over the space of a decade and life expectancy had increased.

4. Priority areas included gender mainstreaming and measures to protect women and children from violence. In addition to introducing gender-sensitive budgeting, the Government had implemented a range of initiatives to promote women's political participation, including constitutional amendments to extend the tenure of women parliamentarians and measures to promote women's leadership at grass-roots level.

5. Bangladesh was experiencing a period of rapid economic growth, and the Government was aware of the need for a robust regulatory regime to ensure the safety and rights of workers. In the wake of industrial accidents, inspections had been carried out in nearly 4,000 garment factories. Measures to protect workers' rights had included the introduction of online registration for trade unions. In 2015, the Government had adopted a policy to protect domestic workers; that ground-breaking initiative would progressively be expanded to cover all informal sectors. The Government was also committed to eliminating child labour: the employment of children in various hazardous occupations had been prohibited and approximately 100,000 children engaged in such work had been rehabilitated. In order to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, the Government had set employment quotas for government jobs and had allocated funding to support the poorest persons living with disabilities.

6. With the aim of ensuring access to social security for the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society, including the unemployed, widows, orphans and the elderly, the Government had adopted the National Social Security Strategy and allocated special budgetary resources to support disadvantaged women. Provision had also been made for maternity and disability allowances. The social protection system accounted for 2 per cent of the State budget.

7. In order to protect the rights and best interests of children, the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 had been enacted, providing for education and training and introducing more severe penalties for involvement in the practice. The corresponding rules were currently being drafted and an action plan had been drawn up.

8. In the agriculture sector, measures had included tax relief, the targeted use of incentives and improved access to banking. Steps had also been taken to enhance food security. A project to promote self-sufficiency in rural areas had been launched in 2009, with a view to creating a poverty-free Bangladesh by 2021; approximately 10 million people had already benefited from that initiative. In addition, legislation had been adopted

to guarantee food safety, leading to the establishment of courts to handle cases related to the manufacture and sale of food.

9. In terms of access to utilities, water supply and sanitation coverage had been improved following the adoption of a national strategy, and the Government had formally acknowledged the right to water in domestic legislation. Approximately 80 per cent of the population had access to electricity and the Government expected to achieve universal access by 2021.

10. In the education sector, significant progress had been made in increasing the literacy rate, which had risen to just over 70 per cent. Stipends were awarded to reduce girls' dropout rates, resulting in almost full enrolment and gender parity at primary level. Stipends were also awarded to children from disadvantaged backgrounds and transgender students. Measures had been taken to support students with disabilities, such as the introduction of textbooks in Braille and a project to establish a national academy for students with autism and neurological disabilities.

11. Remarkable progress had been made in the health sector. The national health policy aimed to ensure primary and emergency care for all on an equitable basis. A network of community clinics had been established to provide affordable care in rural areas. The Government had also developed a national drug policy and drawn up a strategy on adolescent health and well-being, focusing on access to sexual and reproductive health information.

12. The Constitution had been amended to acknowledge that the State was responsible for protecting and developing the culture and traditions of tribal and ethnic communities. In that connection, the Government had enacted the Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institutions Act 2010 and had established a number of cultural institutes. A range of cultural and education programmes had been implemented in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, including measures to enhance access to education in ethnic minority languages. Moreover, the Government planned to construct a cultural complex in the capital city, Dhaka.

13. In response to the crisis in Myanmar, the Government had provided temporary shelter to more than 1 million Rohingya refugees, in coordination with the United Nations and other partners. The protracted presence of Rohingya refugees posed a range of infrastructural and logistic challenges. Although the Government had allocated land for shelters, pressure on resources had led the authorities to decide to temporarily relocate the refugees to Bhashan Char, an island in the southern part of Bangladesh. It must be stressed that the relocation of the refugees was merely an interim measure, as the ultimate aim was to ensure their safe return to Myanmar.

14. The Government viewed international human rights instruments such as the Covenant as tools to achieve the objective of a world without poverty, hunger and suffering, based on the principles of global peace and security for all.

15. **Ms. Liebenberg** (Country Rapporteur) said that the State party had incorporated a number of Covenant rights into its fundamental principles of State policy in part II of the Constitution. However, those rights were not judicially enforceable. She would be interested to know what plans the Government had to strengthen the legal framework for domestic remedies for persons who claimed that their economic, social and cultural rights had been infringed. Moreover, did the Government plan to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Covenant?

16. She welcomed the fact that the second strategic plan of the National Human Rights Commission covered access to economic, social and cultural rights for disadvantaged and marginalized groups. However, there were concerns about the Commission's resources and the fact that it held B status accreditation under the Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (the Paris Principles), subject to certain conditions, particularly with regard to the procedure for selection of members. What measures were contemplated to strengthen the Commission's capacity and resources and to ensure the independence of the selection process?

17. The Committee wished to express its appreciation for the shelter and humanitarian assistance provided to Rohingya refugees and welcomed the delegation's assurances that no

attempt would be made to return the refugees to Myanmar until their safety could be assured. However, she was concerned about the access of Rohingya refugees to economic, social and cultural rights in refugee camps such as Kutupalong and Nayapara, particularly in view of the approaching monsoon season. What measures were being taken to ensure that refugee shelters were safe and habitable, and to prevent disease outbreaks?

18. Given reports of a narrowing of political space for civil society organizations and trade unions, she would appreciate information on the impact of recently adopted legislation in the areas of information and communication technology, foreign donations and digital security on the activities of civil society organizations and the media.

19. The Committee had received reports from indigenous communities regarding the loss of ancestral lands owing to environmental degradation and industrial or agricultural projects implemented without their free, informed and prior consent, as well as a lack of appropriate mechanisms to ensure their political representation. It would be useful to know whether the Government planned to accede to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) and what progress had been made with regard to the adoption of a national land policy for indigenous people and enactment of the Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (2015). The delegation was also invited to indicate what measures were being taken to ensure that the Chittagong Hill Tracts Land Commission, which was now operational, had sufficient resources and whether district offices had been opened, in order to ensure accessibility.

20. The Committee commended the Government's efforts to reduce poverty and applauded the progress achieved in that regard. Indeed, the country was on track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 1, namely to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030. However, despite strong and steady economic growth, the pace of poverty reduction was slowing, regional disparities persisted and income inequality was on the rise, particularly in urban areas. Given the low tax collection rate, she would be interested to know whether the Government planned to reform the tax system, including by widening the tax base, ensuring more effective tax collection and combating tax evasion. What measures could be taken to make the tax system more progressive, particularly with regard to value added tax? She would also welcome information on social spending levels and a statement on whether the current level of investment in the social sector was viewed as adequate.

21. In view of concerns regarding levels of corruption and nepotism in Bangladesh, the delegation was invited to provide information on the measures taken to combat all forms of corruption and to strengthen the work of the Anti-Corruption Commission. In that context, she would also welcome data on the number of persons, particularly high-ranking officials, who had been prosecuted for corruption.

22. Parallel reports had been received dealing with claims of discrimination against minority and disadvantaged groups, including on the basis of caste, ethnic origin, sexual orientation and gender identity. She asked when the Government expected to enact the pending comprehensive anti-discrimination bill and whether it planned to implement any positive discrimination measures, including quotas or reserved posts, to support minority groups.

23. It appeared that the provisions on gender equality enshrined in the Constitution mainly applied to women's rights in the public sphere, while in areas such as property ownership, inheritance rights and marriage, a range of religious personal laws applied to women that did not necessarily uphold the principles of gender equality. Were there plans to reform the personal laws in order to ensure the equal status of women?

The meeting was suspended at 10.35 a.m. and resumed at 10.55 a.m.

24. **Mr. Alam** (Bangladesh) said that, although the fundamental principles of State policy set out in the Constitution were not directly enforceable, claimants could appeal to the courts to request the enforcement of those rights where inscribed in other legislation. Those rights also served as guidelines for the judiciary during the interpretation and application of the Constitution and national legislation.

25. The National Human Rights Commission, established in 2009, had a mandate to conduct investigations, issue recommendations, provide legal aid and carry out research,

training and awareness-raising activities related to human rights. The Government had increased the budget of the Commission by 172 per cent over the previous decade and was considering establishing an additional 93 posts. The Commission had also introduced an individual complaints system. The Government would consider signing the Optional Protocol at a later date.

26. The Anti-Corruption Commission was an independent entity that had been established under the current Government. The Government had twice amended the Anti-Corruption Act since its adoption in 2004 with the aim of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Commission. The Commission held public hearings of corruption cases and had thus far examined 1,200 complaints. It had 2,290 officers, in addition to 25 specialist teams for preventing corruption in institutions and a free hotline for reporting corruption. Between 2013 and 2017, the Commission had filed 1,655 cases of corruption, including 222 cases of money-laundering, and had secured the conviction of 622 public officials. It had seized property to the value of US$ 87 million and had frozen 1,408 bank accounts. Among its high-profile cases, the Commission had secured the conviction of a former prime minister and her family and had recently investigated members of the board of directors of BASIC Bank.

27. The Constitution recognized the fundamental rights of all citizens, regardless of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and considered all citizens to be indigenous. That position was in consonance with the legal definition of tribal and indigenous peoples set out in the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). Although Bangladesh was not party to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Constitution of Bangladesh (Fifteenth Amendment) Act of 2011 provided greater protection for the rights, languages and religions of all small ethnic groups.

28. Although the Government had faced challenges in implementing the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord owing to a lack of government continuity, in particular between 2001 and 2008, progress was now being made. Of the 72 clauses, 63 had been implemented in full or in part, and an implementation committee had been re-established. The issue of land rights was one of the clauses that still needed to be resolved, however. Two additional land offices had been established in the hill districts to process the large volume of cases.

29. The anti-discrimination bill, which was based on article 28 of the Constitution, had been drafted by the Law Commission with the participation of the National Human Rights Commission. The Government had decided, however, to redraft the bill to take into account the Sustainable Development Goals and the recent measures taken to support marginalized communities, such as the recognition of hijras and transgender persons. It was difficult to estimate when the bill would be adopted, as elections were approaching, but the Government took care to always include an anti-discrimination approach in its legislation.

30. Efforts were being made to increase tax revenue, such as through the tax fair, first held in 2010, which provided citizens with an opportunity to discuss tax matters with the authorities. The number of tax returns received had risen from 161,000 in 2015 to 300,000 in 2017, equating to a 10–12 per cent increase in tax revenue. The Government also continued to monitor high-level taxpayers to prevent avoidance.

31. Article 57 had been introduced into the Information and Communication Technology Act in response to several incidents in which falsified information and images spread through social media had triggered acts of violence against ethnic or religious groups. The article had provoked controversy, however, in particular among journalists, as it had been frequently misused. The judiciary had subsequently agreed to accept cases under article 57 only where the courts had ascertained that the aim of the case was not to harass another person. The Government was currently reviewing a bill on digital security which, if adopted, would repeal the Information and Communication Technology Act. Some concerns had been raised regarding the potential impact of the bill on investigative journalism, as it stated that all journalistic sources must be disclosed, but the Government was committed to ensuring that the law, if adopted, would not be used to harass journalists.

32. Bangladesh had a large number of television stations, radio stations, newspapers and trained journalists. The Government had also established the Bangladesh Journalist Welfare

Trust and had taken steps towards setting a minimum wage for journalists. Attacks against journalists and bloggers were treated seriously, and intelligence and security efforts had been stepped up to prevent further attacks.

33. The number of Rohingya in Bangladesh had increased from around 300,000 in the 1990s to the current figure of 1,090,000. The Government provided Rohingya refugees with shelter and biometric registration cards. It had increased the land available for the Balukhali camp from 2,000 acres to 5,800 acres, and it was taking steps to ensure that the 100,000 refugees identified as being vulnerable to landslides during the monsoon season were protected or relocated within the camp. Bangladesh welcomed all international monetary contributions and remained committed to helping Rohingya refugees regardless of the funds received and despite the internal pressures faced.

34. The national policy provided for an increase of 10 per cent each year in allocations to social safety net programmes. The proportion of the population suffering from extreme poverty had declined from 41 per cent in the 1990s to the current figure of 11.5 per cent. It was hoped to reduce the overall poverty ratio, which was currently about 22 per cent, to a single-digit figure by 2021. According to a report published by the World Economic Forum in 2017, Bangladesh ranked thirty-fourth in the world in terms of the inclusive development index. However, the southwestern region of Bangladesh was frequently struck by heavy rainfall and there had been an extended monsoon season in 2017, which had prevented the inhabitants from harvesting crops and increased the poverty rate. The budget for social benefits in the region was therefore regularly expanded.

35. There was no inequality between men and women under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina Wazed, who championed the empowerment of women. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, Bangladesh ranked forty-seventh in the world in terms of the overall gender gap index and sixth in the world in terms of the gender gap in politics. There were clearly some sensitive areas involving personal and family legislation, in which the religious dimension was predominant. However, Bangladesh was a multi-religious and multiracial country, and progress was gradually being achieved in that regard. Most of the country's population were Muslims, followed by Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and other minority communities. In the absence of a uniform family code, disputes related to marriage, divorce, custody of children, guardianship and inheritance were addressed under diverse personal legislation. The State had enacted a number of generally applicable laws to deal with disputes such as the repression of women and domestic violence. Although the Family Courts Ordinance of 1985 had provided for an effective forum through which all communities could seek legal redress and the lower court system had been expanded to serve the sub-district (*upazila*) level, in practice most family disputes were settled through the system of traditional village mediation councils (*shalish*).

36. **Mr. Kedzia** said that that the State party's Constitution referred specifically to citizens as rights holders in the preamble and in article 15, which addressed matters of special interest to the Committee. The Covenant, on the other hand, required that the rights of all persons under the jurisdiction of the State party should be protected. He wished to know how the State party resolved that problem.

37. As noted in the report, the State party, on acceding to the Covenant, had made a number of declarations concerning important articles and rights which seemed to render its implementation subject to the Constitution and domestic law. He would appreciate information on the impact of those declarations or reservations on the implementation of the Covenant. The delegation seemed to be conveying the message that the reservations had no impact, but if that was the case, they should surely be reviewed, amended or withdrawn.

38. He understood that the anti-discrimination bill was based on the brief and closed list of prohibited grounds of discrimination contained in article 28 of the Constitution. The grounds listed in article 2 of the Covenant were longer and open-ended, since the final words in the list were "or other status". In that regard, he wished to draw the delegation's attention to the Committee's general comment No. 20 on non-discrimination, which clarified why such a short list was incompatible with article 2 of the Covenant.

39. Article 2A of the Constitution referred to the State religion. He asked whether, from the standpoint of economic, social and cultural rights, family law was the only legal area

affected by the declaration of a State religion. He also asked to what extent Islamic sharia and other religious regulations were compatible with the Covenant. For example, if there was a conflict in a specific situation between the entitlements of women under State law and religious law, which would prevail in legal proceedings?

40. The State party's report clearly stated that economic, social and cultural rights were not justiciable. Article 15 of the Constitution certainly imposed obligations on the State, but rights holders could not, in his view, file claims related to such obligations. He asked whether such considerations were taken into account when Covenant rights were invoked in different forums.

41. **Mr. Sadi** asked why the State party, which seemed to be deeply devoted to the Covenant, had taken such a long time to submit its initial report.

42. Policymakers had achieved impressive progress in the consolidation of democracy, but how aware were they of the Covenant? Was it taken into account, for example, in economic planning? Article 2 of the Covenant required States parties to use their available resources to the maximum extent in support of Covenant rights. He asked whether there were any indicators of the extent to which available resources had been used for that purpose in the State party.

43. Given the small number of women in the delegation, he would welcome more information on the State party's perception of gender equality and asked whether there were any indicators of its observance in practice.

44. There were reports that Bangladeshi women working in the Middle East and elsewhere as domestic employees had frequently been subjected to ill-treatment. He asked whether safeguards were in place to protect domestic workers from exploitation and abuse.

45. **Ms. Shin** said that she would appreciate information about the situation with respect to universal birth, marriage and death registration. The Committee had been told that only a small proportion of births were registered and that marriage registration depended on a person's religion. It was important to know how many people belonging to specific religions or ethnicities were resident in each region in order to guarantee their economic, social and cultural rights.

46. **Mr. Uprimny** asked what options citizens had if economic, social and cultural rights were not covered by legislation. For instance, article 19 of the Constitution guaranteed equality of opportunity, but could persons who were denied equality of opportunity in employment file a lawsuit, if that right was not enshrined in specific legislation?

47. With regard to sexual orientation and gender identity, he understood that consensual sexual acts between same-sex couples were criminalized by article 377 of the Criminal Code. He asked how that provision could be compatible with the Committee's general comment No. 20, according to which gender discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was contrary to the Covenant and the principle of equality of opportunity.

48. Noting that the State party depended to a great extent on indirect rather than direct taxation, he asked what specific steps could be taken to render the system more progressive and to promote direct taxation in order to raise more resources.

49. **Ms. Liebenberg** said that she would appreciate statistics on progress in implementing the Vested Properties Return Act, 2011.

50. Pressures on land from the dense population and the impact of climate change were likely to increase and give rise to conflicts. She asked whether there was a land management policy, whether there were procedures in place to expropriate land for public purposes, and to what extent human rights principles such as consultation and alternative accommodation were respected in cases involving, for example, dam construction and agricultural modernization.

51. The data on the deceleration of the rate of poverty reduction in certain regions, particularly Rangpur, came from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey for 2016–2017.

52. **The Chair** said that the existence of the individual complaint procedure implemented by the National Human Rights Commission should actually strengthen the State party's resolve to ratify the Optional Protocol. Bangladesh could send an important message to its neighbours if it proceeded with the ratification process.

53. The Committee had concerns about the shrinking space within which advocacy NGOs could make their voices heard, inter alia because the Special Powers Act of 1974 was acquiring increased importance. She would therefore appreciate hearing the State party's assessment of the current situation.

54. Reiterating the view that the new anti-discrimination bill should contain an open-ended list of grounds for discrimination, she requested additional information on the action taken to prevent discrimination against the Dalit community.

The meeting was suspended at 12.10 p.m. and resumed at 12.25 p.m.

55. **Ms. Monica** (Bangladesh) said that it was difficult to make economic, social and cultural rights directly enforceable owing to the country's financial circumstances and limited resources. Such rights must therefore be realized progressively and were classified in the Constitution as fundamental principles. On the other hand, civil and political rights were considered to be fundamental rights and could therefore be directly enforced. The Government had taken measures to ensure universal enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, including the introduction of legislation and administrative decisions. It should be noted that some laws were applicable to Bangladeshi citizens only, while others also applied to citizens of other countries. It would take time to ensure the enjoyment of all rights by all persons, irrespective of their legal status.

56. The Government had made reservations about a number of articles in the Covenant upon its accession, although those reservations could be lifted when the Government had sufficient resources and political will to align its legislation with the provisions of the Covenant. The reservations regarding articles 2, 3 and 10 were conditioned by the preference in Bangladesh for personal laws that could discriminate against women in terms of, inter alia, inheritance and divorce, and could not be lifted until those personal laws were amended or rescinded. The reservations on articles 7 and 8 were affected by its definitions of "child" or "child labour", which differed from those of other countries. However, those articles would be progressively implemented; the Children Act of 1974, for example, had been amended in 2013 to bring it in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Although the Government had made significant progress towards equal access to education and had implemented universal primary education, the right to education could not be fully implemented without additional financial resources. While the Government had introduced a number of policy measures and awareness-raising programmes, the prevailing socioeconomic conditions in the country must be taken into account.

57. The anti-discrimination bill and its list of prohibited grounds for discrimination were under review. The Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs was leading an inclusive, participatory process to obtain the input of civil society organizations and other ministries in order to improve and finalize the bill. Further information on the content of the bill was available in Bangla on the website of the Law Commission of Bangladesh.

58. Islam had been declared the State religion in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the population. However, that decision would not negatively affect the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights by other religious groups, as non-discrimination and secularism remained among the country's core constitutional principles.

59. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that fundamental principles could become legally enforceable through their inclusion in legislation or mechanisms. For example, the constitutional obligation of social security coverage was a fundamental principle that was directly implemented through a number of laws.

60. **Mr. Ahmed** (Bangladesh) said that a law had been passed in 2001 on the return of vested properties to their original owner or successor in interest. As there was no simple way to dispose of land, Parliament had revised the law to specify time periods for the preparation and dissemination of the list of properties to be returned to members of the Hindu community. Over 400,000 acres of land had already been disbursed through

administrative processes, and approximately 200,000 acres would be released on the completion of judicial procedures. There was a separate court for handling such cases and all interested parties were able to file claims. It was hoped that the process would be completed in the near future.

61. **Mr. Alam** (Bangladesh) said that the country's initial periodic report had not been submitted on time owing to a lack of capacity and continuity. However, the priorities of the political parties had recently changed and the Government was committed to global engagement. Policymakers were aware of their obligations under the Covenant and had acted accordingly, such as by recognizing hijras as a third gender on all official forms. Moreover, the tax network had been expanded and a new policy on value added tax had been implemented the previous year, following over three years of consultations with the business community.

62. Remittances sent back to Bangladesh by citizens working abroad were a major part of the economy, with Bangladeshi migrant workers contributing billions of dollars annually. In an effort to reduce reliance on aid, 4 million Bangladeshis, the majority of whom were female, worked abroad through a number of memorandums of understanding and bilateral labour agreements. The Government, particularly the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, was working with partner countries to ensure dignified and respectful working conditions. Unfortunately, there were cases of mistreatment and exploitation, and the Government had needed to build shelters and safe houses for workers. As a result, labour migration to a number of countries was discouraged or had been suspended.

63. Children were required to be registered at birth; without a birth certificate, it was not possible to enrol a child in primary school. Marriage registration was compulsory under the Muslim Marriages and Divorces (Registration) Act of 1974 and the Hindu Marriage Registration Act of 2012. It was also necessary to register deaths, as the property or bank accounts of deceased persons could not be accessed without a death certificate.

64. **Ms. Faizunnesa** (Bangladesh) said that non-discrimination and gender equality were enshrined in the Constitution and domestic legislation. Women constituted 33 per cent of diplomats and there were 7 female ambassadors, who were career diplomats rather than political appointees. There were quotas requiring women to account for 60 per cent of teachers in primary schools and 10 per cent of high-ranking government jobs. The Prime Minister, leader of the opposition and parliamentary speaker were all women. Moreover, in 2016, the Prime Minister had received the Planet 50-50 Champion and Agent of Change awards from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women for her contributions to women's empowerment. Bangladesh was also an active participant in the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

65. It was necessary to take the prevailing sociocultural context in Bangladesh into account when considering the recognition of hijras and sexual orientation. Since recognizing hijras as a third gender, the Government had been developing social security measures in order to facilitate their social rehabilitation. Same-sex relations were criminalized under legislation dating from the colonial period. However, in line with the principle of universal health care, the Government had provided an AIDS intervention programme for different at-risk groups, in order to ensure access to treatment.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.